

Beauty and the Beast



Retold by CYNTHIA RYLANT

Pictures by MEG PARK



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For my parents
-M.P.

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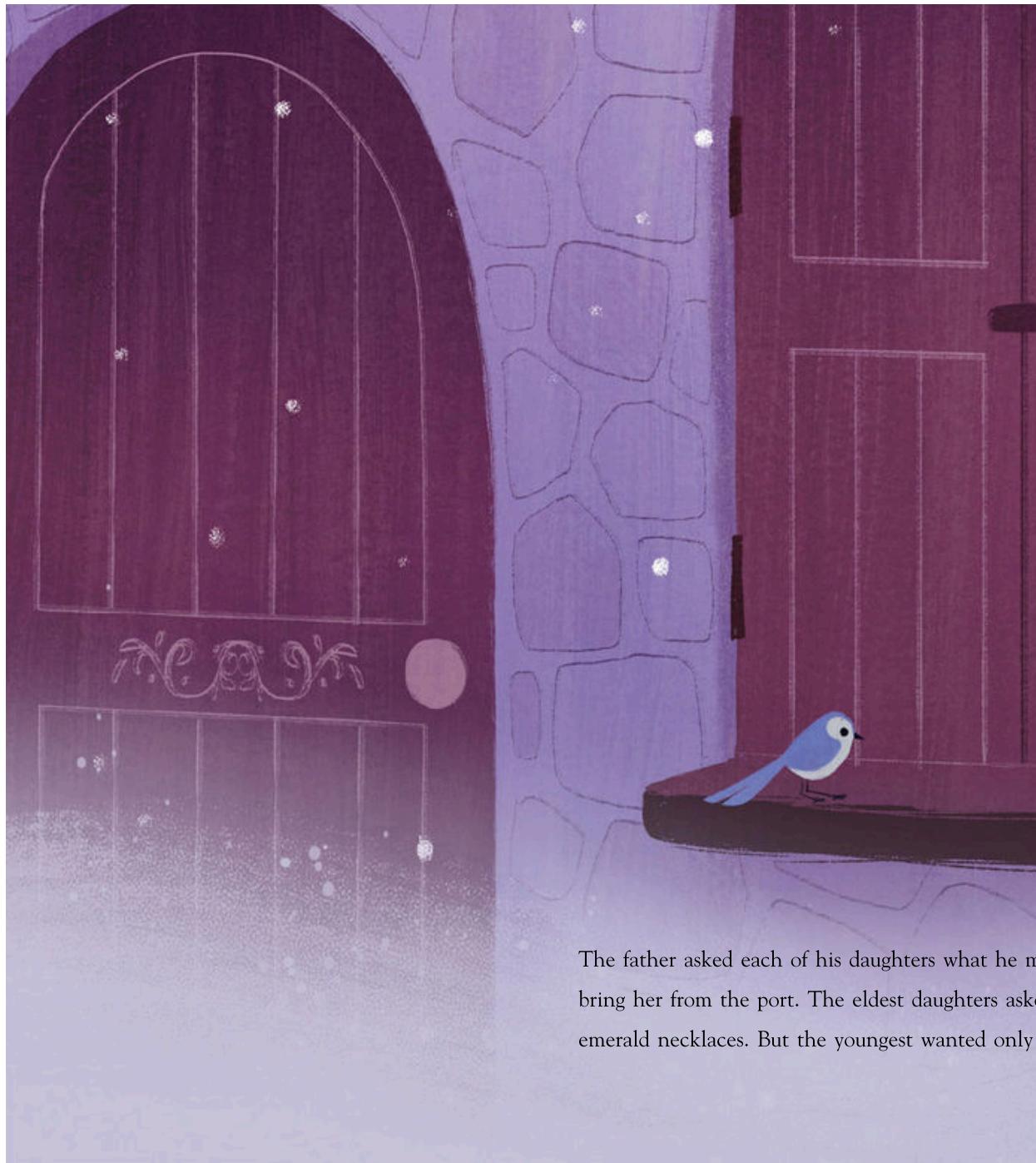
There lived three sisters and a father in a humble house in the country. They had once known great riches. But the father's business had failed, and now they lived a spare, hard life.

Two of the three sisters were darkly discontent. They muttered day and night about their unfair lot. The third daughter—the youngest—was different. She did not mutter. She sang.



One day good news arrived. A ship thought lost at sea had sailed into port and on it was cargo belonging to Beauty's father. This cargo would restore all his lost riches.





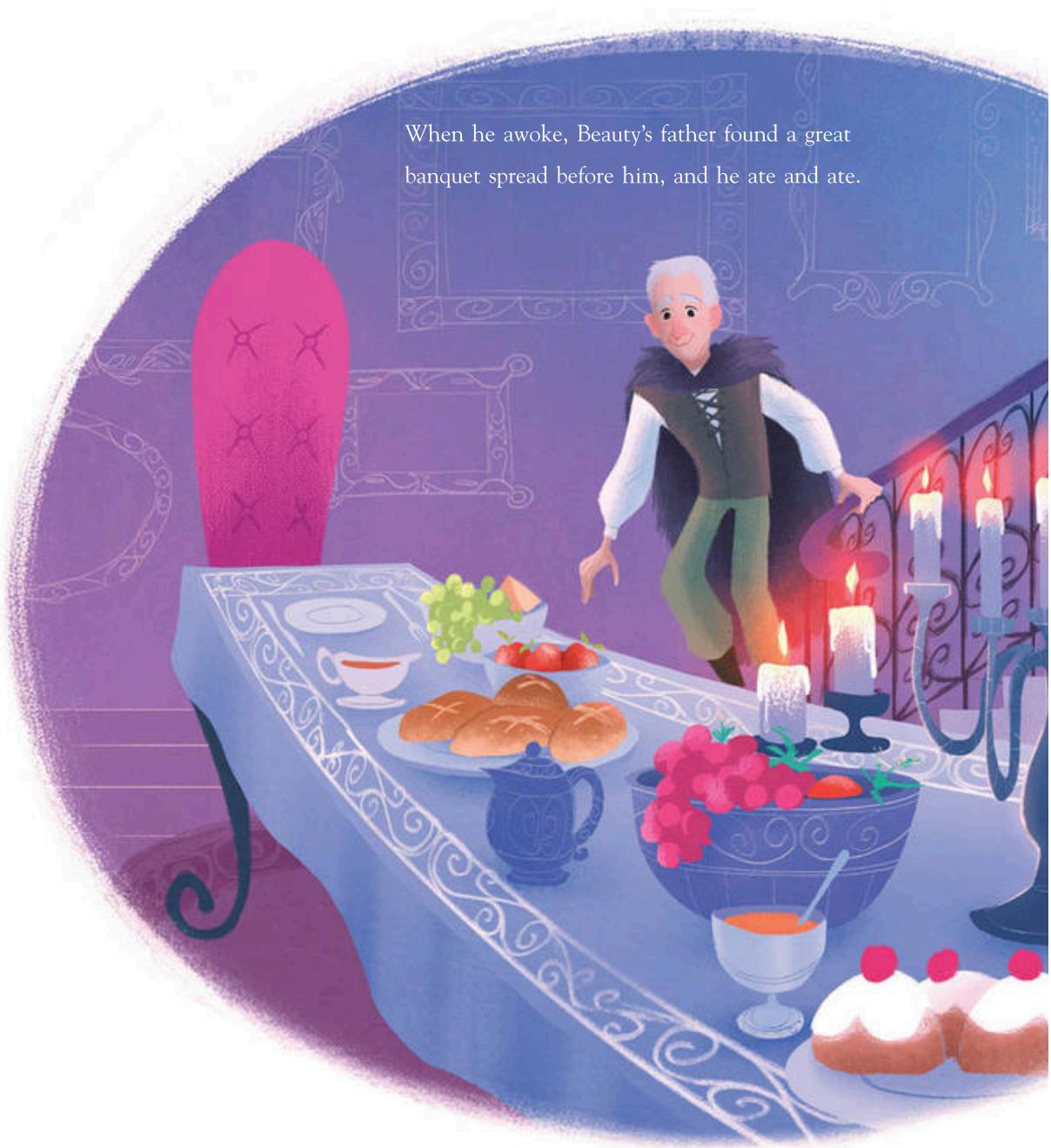
The father asked each of his daughters what he might bring her from the port. The eldest daughters asked for emerald necklaces. But the youngest wanted only

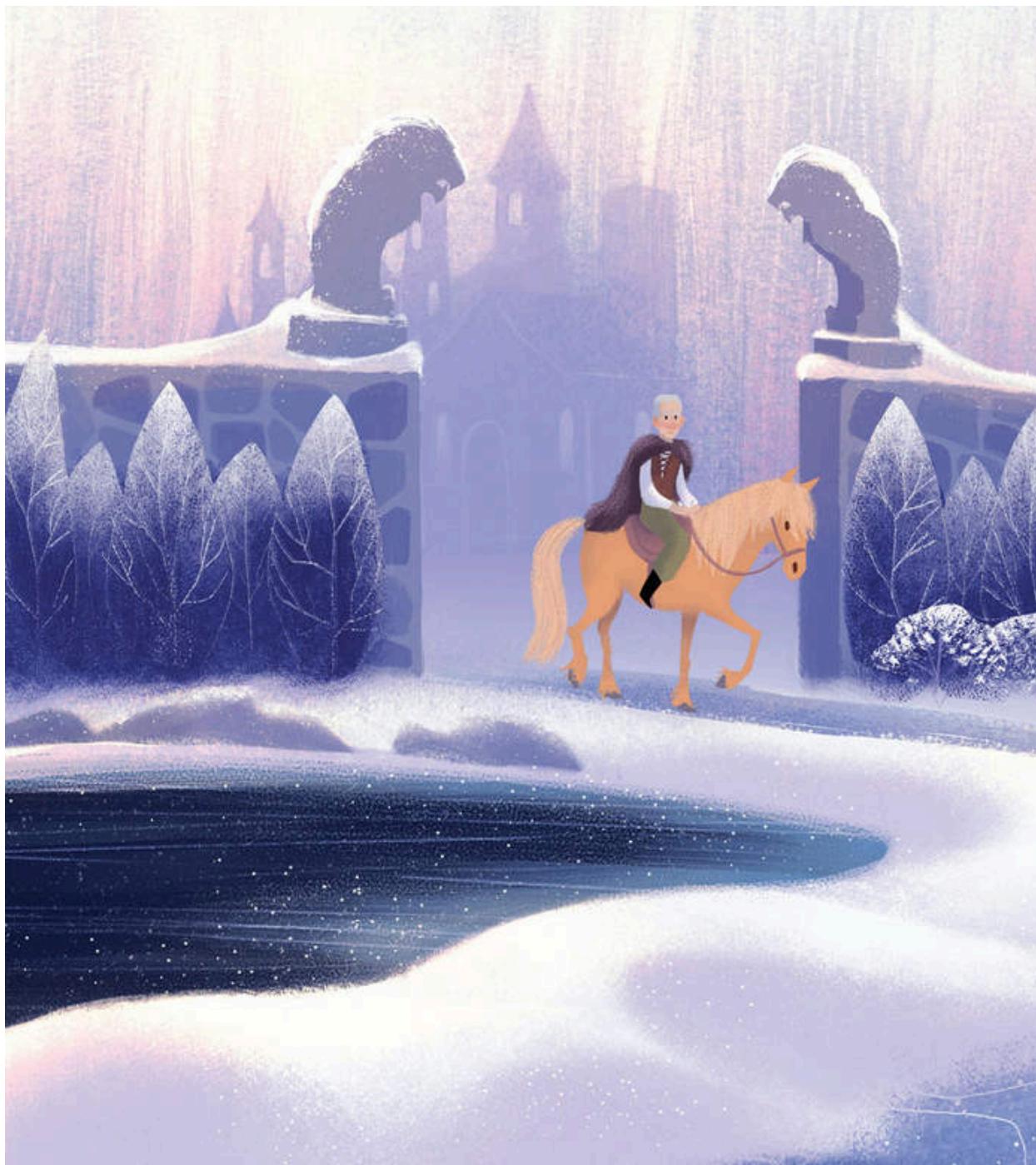


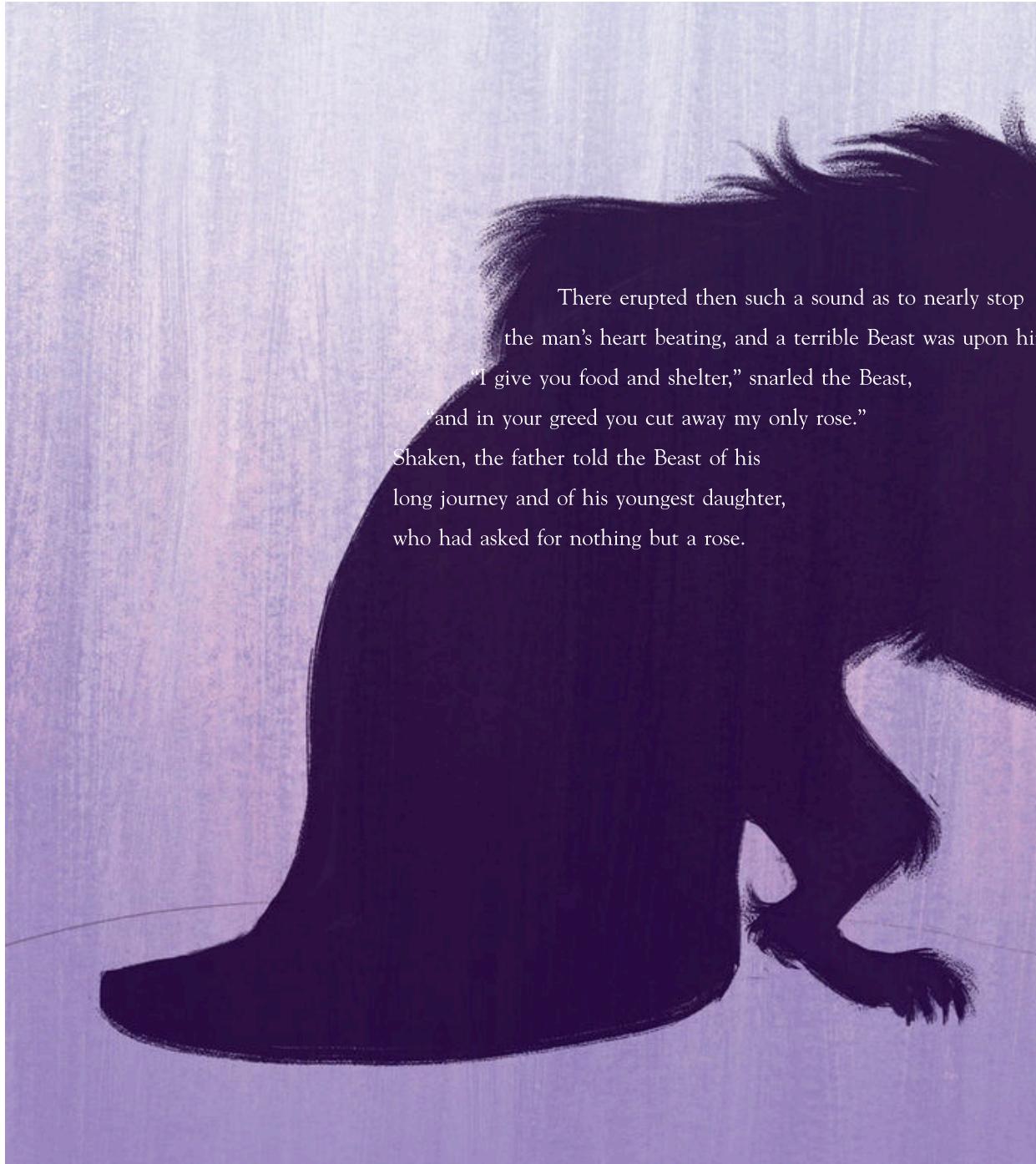
But, alas, there was tragedy. When Beauty's father arrived at the port, all his cargo had been stolen. He was left with nothing and faced a long, sad journey home.

Deep in the forest, a blizzard set upon him. He became lost. His horse guided him to a stone castle in the wood, and the poor man stumbled inside, fell on the floor, and slept.

When he awoke, Beauty's father found a great banquet spread before him, and he ate and ate.







There erupted then such a sound as to nearly stop
the man's heart beating, and a terrible Beast was upon him.

"I give you food and shelter," snarled the Beast,
"and in your greed you cut away my only rose."

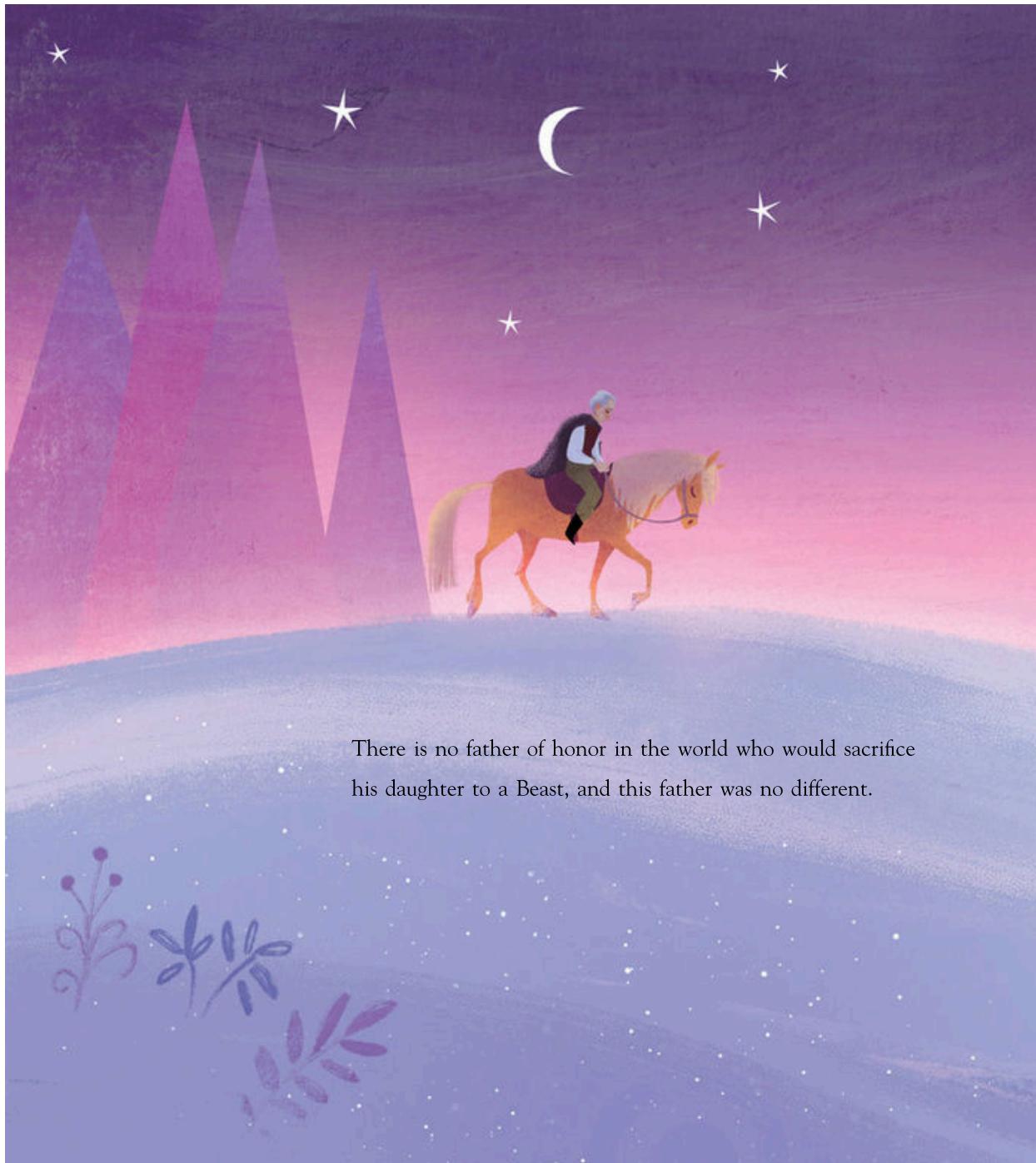
Shaken, the father told the Beast of his
long journey and of his youngest daughter,
who had asked for nothing but a rose.

“That you do,” said the Beast, “and from this day forward
you will remain here and be my servant.”

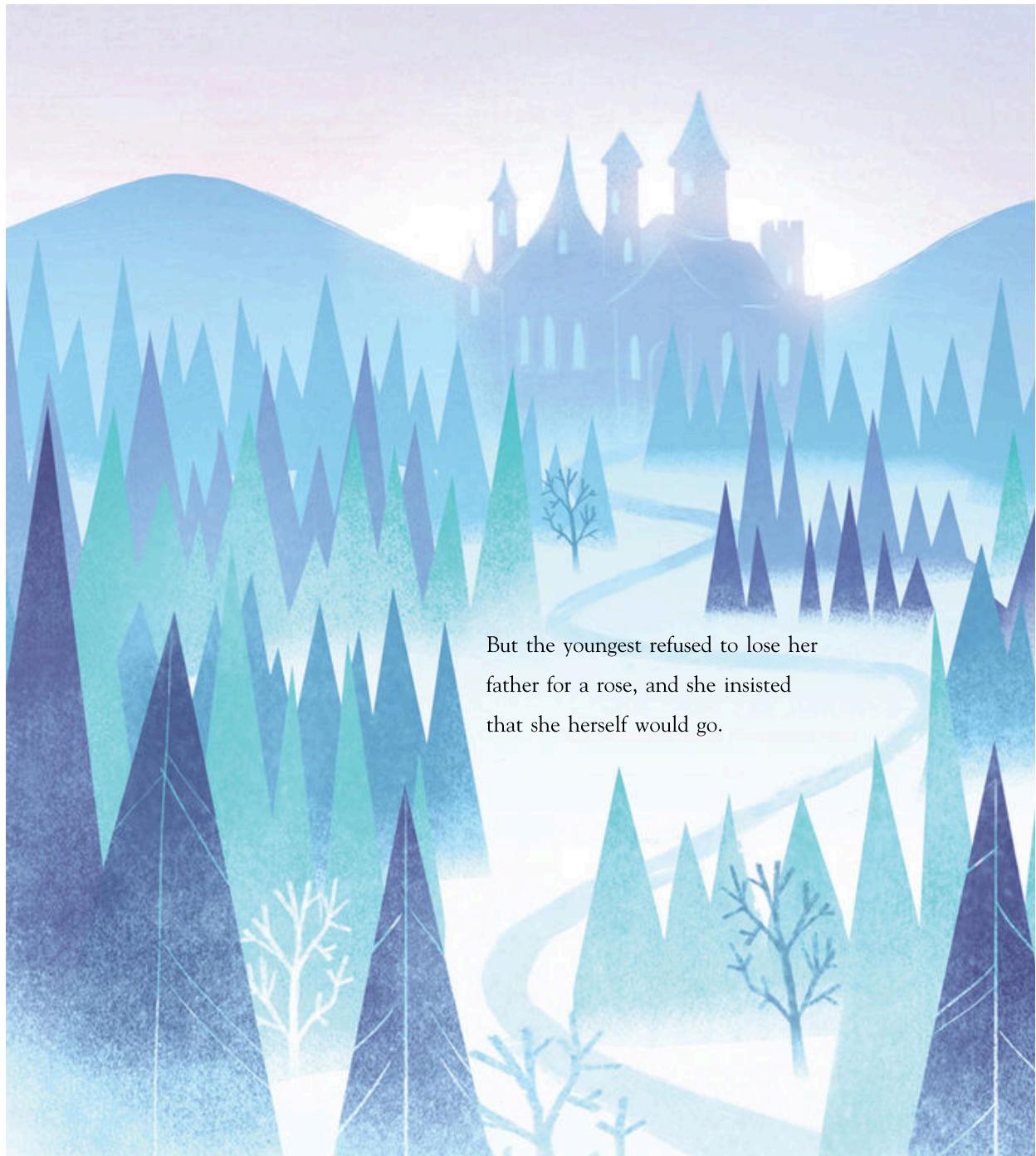
“But my daughters will be lonely without me!” cried the father.

And the Beast, who knew loneliness better than
this father would ever understand, fell silent.





There is no father of honor in the world who would sacrifice his daughter to a Beast, and this father was no different.



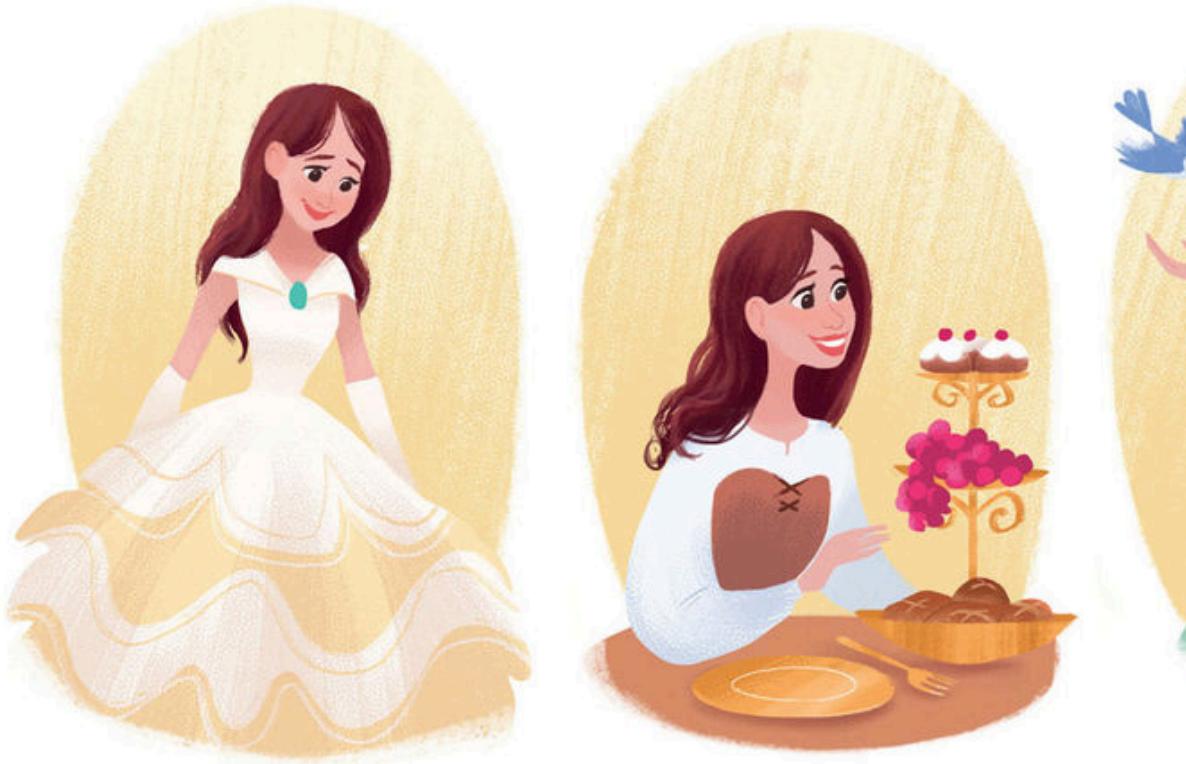
But the youngest refused to lose her
father for a rose, and she insisted
that she herself would go.



Beauty had prepared herself for the Beast's terribleness,
and when he took her hand, she did not tremble.
So began the story of Beauty and the Beast.



The Beast was kind to her. She wore the loveliest gowns, ate the finest food, and never once was she asked to serve.



Mornings the Beast walked with her in the gardens and named the birds who flew there. Evenings he read to her from a book of sonnets.

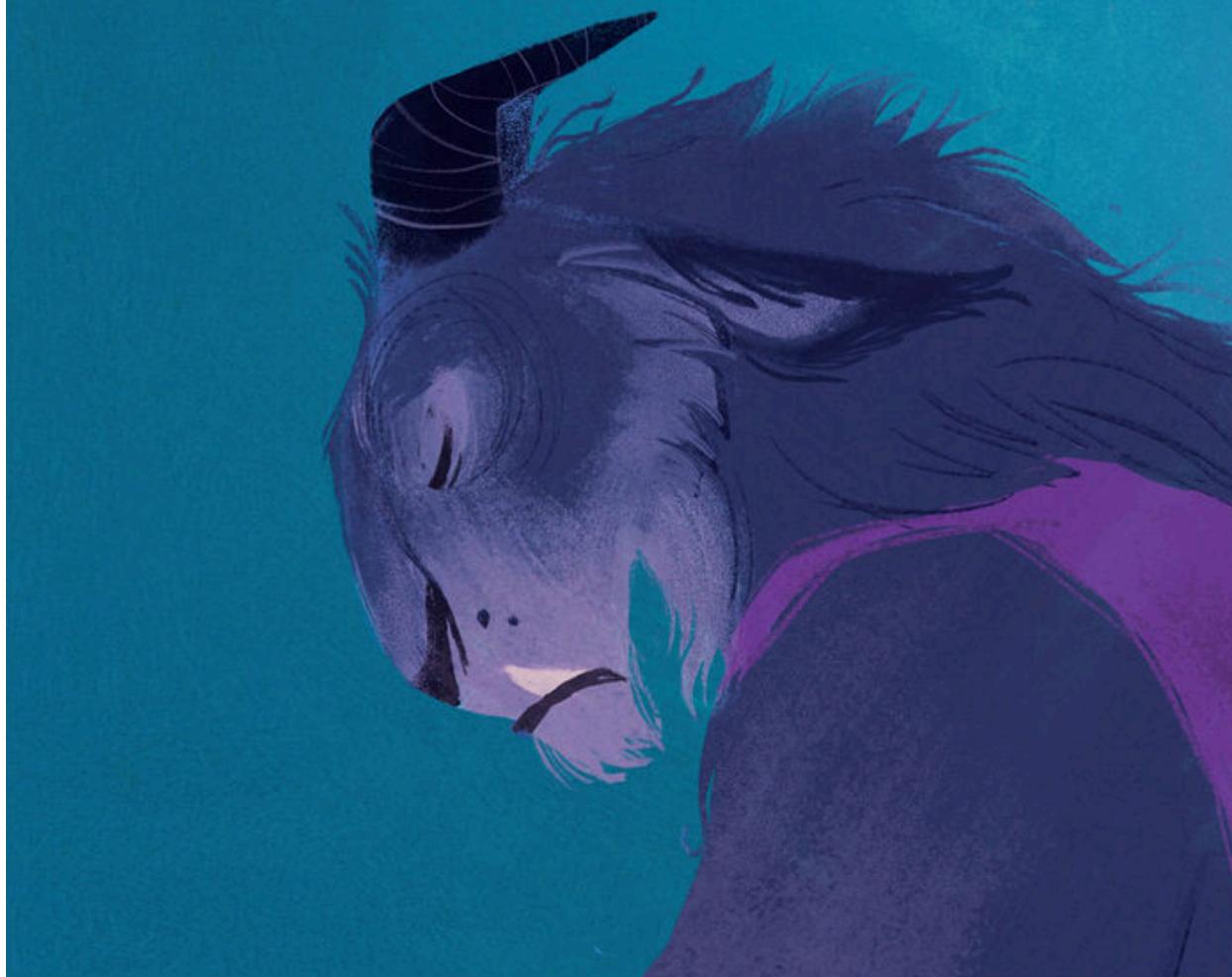


Then one day the Beast asked her to marry him.

But Beauty said sadly, "I cannot marry you, for I do not love you."

That night Beauty had a dream that her father, sick with worry for her, had become ill. She asked the Beast to let her go home. "NO!" he roared. For the first time, Beauty drew away from him.

But because he did love her, the Beast let her go. She promised she would return. But he did not believe her.

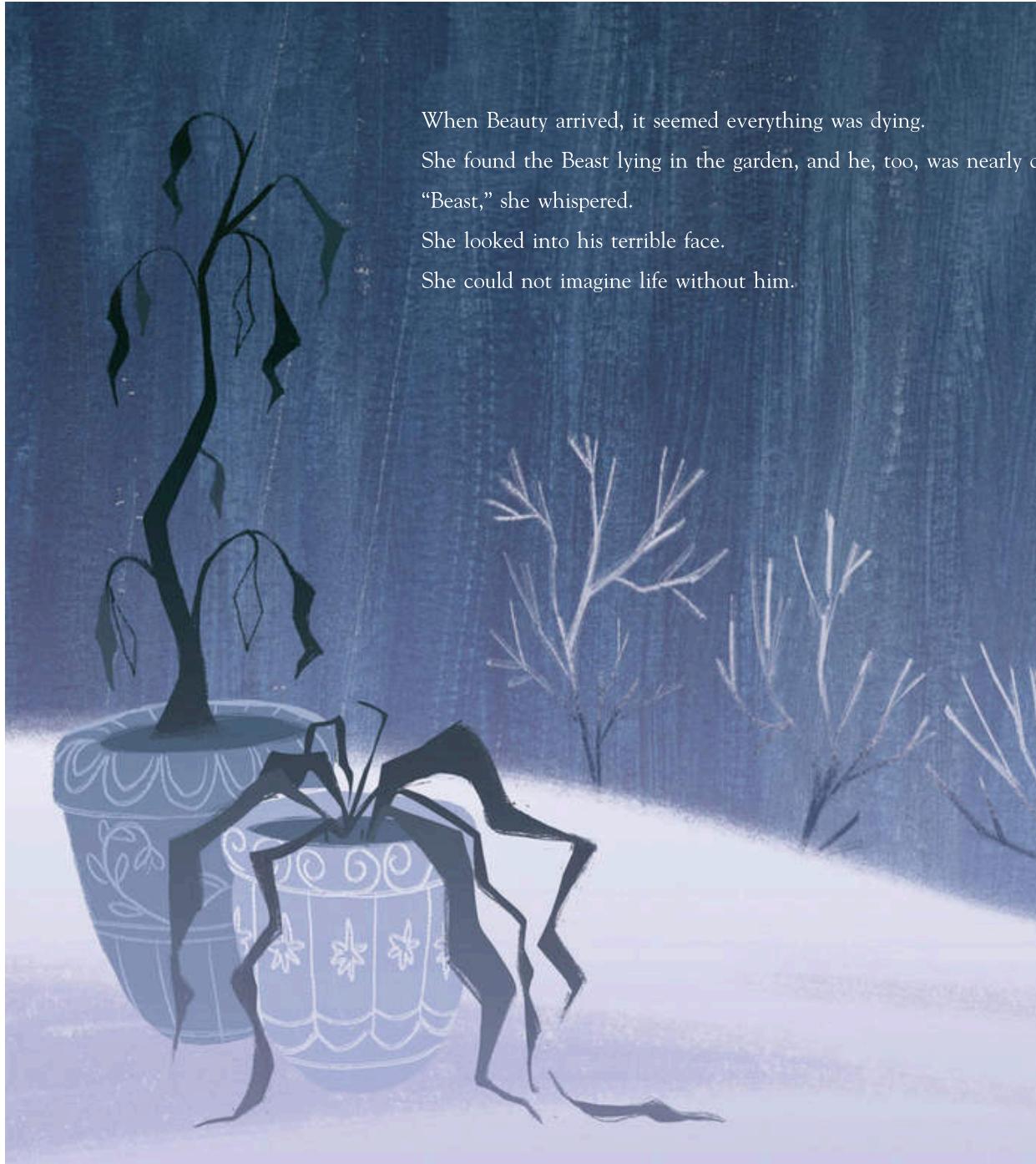


Gratefully, Beauty went home and nursed her father back to health.





In the morning she rode hard to the stone castle.



When Beauty arrived, it seemed everything was dying.
She found the Beast lying in the garden, and he, too, was nearly dead.
"Beast," she whispered.
She looked into his terrible face.
She could not imagine life without him.

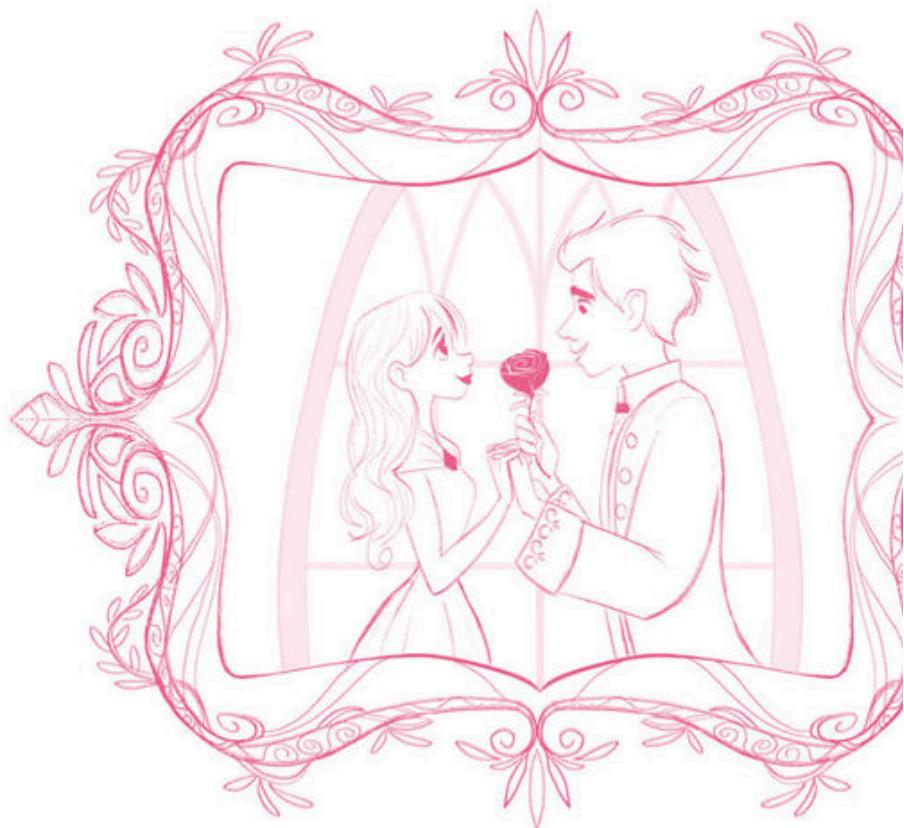


The moment she spoke those words, the Beast gave a terrible shudder, and at once was transformed into a beautiful young man.

"No!" cried Beauty. "Where is my Beast?"

The young man smiled and spoke to her softly.

He told her that he had once been a young prince living in his father's kingdom. When he refused to marry the daughter of a wicked witch, the witch cast a spell on him, trapping him in ugliness and loneliness. This spell could be broken only by love.



The miracle is that it was.

